

# Mary: the Second Eve by Brad Jersak

**H**ail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee!  
Blessed art thou among  
women!—Luke 1:28

When the archangel Gabriel first visited the teen virgin Mary, we catch wind of human destiny implicit in the angelic greeting, “Hail, Mary, full of grace!”

The NIV misses the obvious point, translating the key Greek word [*charitou*] as “highly favored one,” as if to say, “Lucky you!” But as with all of Mary’s honorifics, the point is *always* the identity of the One in her womb. Mary’s womb would be filled with Grace Incarnate—our Lord Jesus Christ!

This Virgin/Son destiny was foretold from the beginning when after the fall of Adam and Eve, God prophesied to the serpent concerning “Eve, mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20) and her Offspring, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers [Christ]; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

We call this verse the “*protevangeli-um*” (lit., first gospel) as it is the Bible’s first messianic prophecy. One day, Eve’s Descendant—a “second Adam”—would come defeat the serpent and undo death’s curse.

## Eve’s Offspring

Many English Bibles begin Genesis 4 with Eve’s announcement, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Unfortunately, most English Bibles insert the words “the help of.”



Notre Dame, Paris - Portal of the Last Judgment  
The Serpent tempts Eve, who shares with Adam.

Far more interesting (to Jewish Rabbis at least) is what the Hebrew actually says, rendered variously:

“I have given birth to a male child—the LORD” (ISV).

“I have gotten a man from the LORD” (KJV)—literally, “with Yahweh.”

The *Palestinian Targum*, an ancient Rabbinical source, gets

more creative: “And Adam knew Eve his wife, who had desired the Angel; and she conceived, and bare Cain; and she said, I have acquired a man, the Angel of the LORD.”

The Aramaic *Jonathan Targum* claims, “Adam knew his wife Eve, who was pregnant by Sammael [the serpent!], and she conceived and bare Cain, and he was like the heavenly beings, and not like earthly beings, and she said, I have gotten a man from the angel of the Lord.”

While these translations sound outrageous, given the ambiguity of the Hebrew text and the creativity of Jewish rabbis, one could

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imagine Cain as either *the Lord* (Eve's expected Deliverer) or *with/from the Lord* (a virgin birth with God as Father) or even the murderous offspring of Eve *with the serpent!*

While the latter explanation is the most bizarre, it does beg the question: who is the serpent's offspring that will strike at the Messiah's heel?

Jesus answers that question when he chastises those who plot his death. They are, at least symbolically, "children of the devil," reminiscent of "the murderer from the beginning" (see John 8:37-45). No wonder Jesus' opponents were livid!

My point so far is that Eve may have truly believed Cain was God's promised redeemer, but the second Adam's arrival would await another epoch.

For as in Adam all die,  
so in Christ all will be  
made alive.  
1 Corinthians 15:21-22

## The Second Adam

If ever there was a murderous son of the serpent, it was that young rabbi, Saul of Tarsus, licensed to kill in the name of religious zeal. Only after his lightning bolt encounter with the risen Christ would he come to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15—the long-awaited Seed of Eve and the second Adam. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, we read,

*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin,*

*and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned, ...how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*

*Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's [Adam's] sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man [Adam], how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*

*Consequently, just as one trespass [Adam's] resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous [Jesus'] act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:12, 15-19).*

And again, in Paul's first epistle to the church in Corinth:

*For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [Jesus]. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).*

The symmetry of these texts is beautiful—even melodic. Imagine Paul's communities singing them, echoing **all** and **how much more** joyously through the dim catacombs

beneath Rome.

The curse of death had visited the whole human race through Adam; **how much more** has Christ's sacrificial grace-gift conquered death for **all**—the whole human race. In Adam, **all** die (temporally) and through Christ **all** are made alive (eternally)! Indeed, these verses powerfully express Paul's bold universal hope in Christ.

## The Second Eve

Within a few generations, the early church would identify a similar symmetry between Eve and Mary. In one epistle, sermon and hymn after another, the apostles' spiritual heirs emphasize the corresponding contrast:

- As in Adam, so in Christ...
- As through Adam, so through Christ...
- As through Eve, now through Mary...
- As through the lying words of the Serpent, so through the gospeling words of Gabriel...
- As through the deception and disobedience of a virgin, so through the revelation and obedience of the Virgin...
- As through the Mother of all the living came death, so through the Mother of Life came life to all.

Brilliant! Allow me a few samples from the early Fathers:

**Tertullian**, the African Latin theologian wrote:

"Into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word that was the framer of death. Equally into a Virgin was introduced the Word of God which was the builder-up of life. Eve had

believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. The fault which the one committed by belief, the other by believing has blotted out."

**Irenaeus** of Lyons, France (grand-disciple to the apostle John) said,

"The knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by unbelief, Mary, a virgin, set free by faith."

And again, later in the same book, Irenaeus adds,

"As Eve was seduced by the speech of an angel, and fled from God, so also by means of the angel's speech, Mary received the good tidings, being obedient to his word, and bore God within her. And, though the one had disobeyed God, yet the other was drawn to obey God."

These themes got around. Back in Jerusalem, **Cyril** taught new believers, "Since through Eve, a

virgin, came death, so from a Virgin should life appear; that, as the serpent had deceived the one, so to the other Gabriel might bring good tidings."

Similarly, **Ephraim** (in Syria) agreed, "Through Eve, the beautiful and desirable glory of men was extinguished; but it has revived through Mary." The old desert saint loved to write these themes into his poetry:

"In the beginning, the serpent filled the ears of Eve, and the poison spread over the whole body; today, Mary from her ears received the champion of eternal happiness: what, therefore, was an instrument of death, is an instrument of life also."

By now, I hope you can see the layers of comparison. I'll list them for you:

- Eve's disobedience is undone by Mary's obedience. But it's more than that:
- Eve's disobedience is as a virgin. Mary's



## THE RESURRECTION, ADAM & EVE

The various versions of the ancient *Anastasis* (Resurrection) icon all include common themes. This modern rendition, by Canadian-Egyptian artist, Kirillos Kilada, features all the key elements.

Rather than exiting the empty tomb, Christ stands on the broken gates of Hades (representing the power of death). Its locks and bolts are strewn beneath his feet, where we see the conquered serpent lies prone (sometimes pictured as the bound strongman or defeated dragon).

Most important, the Risen Christ does not rise alone. He has descended to the deepest place in the underworld to raise Adam and Eve (representing humanity) with himself. He has them by the wrists to indicate their salvation is by grace alone. They could not escape their tombs or even take his hand of their own accord. The salvation of humanity is accomplished through Christ's death, descent and resurrection. Their part and ours is simply to surrender to his overcoming Grace, rising in Christ just as we fell in Adam.

obedience is as the Virgin.

- The deceptive words of the first fallen angel (the serpent) are overcome by the good tidings of the first gospel angel (Gabriel).

- The first Eve bears a murderer and the second Eve bears a life-giving Savior.

- Eve's deception is undone by Mary's revelation as the willing mother of God Incarnate.

Mary, the second Eve, bears her own Savior, Christ the second Adam! And not her Savior only—he is the Savior of the world, your Savior and mine! And yes, as we see in the featured artwork of Mary consoling Eve, Mary the mother of Jesus retroactively bears Eve's Savior as well!

We also see how our Second Adam rescues Adam and Eve in the famous Greek icon of the *Anastasis* (Resurrection). It does *not* show Christ leaving his tomb—rather, it depicts Christ standing on the broken gates of *Hades*, drawing

Adam and Eve out of their tombs and thus, raising all humanity up with himself.

I'll conclude with a centuries-old song of the Nativity and Resurrection, addressing the Virgin Mary and her Christ:

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[To Mary]: You have repaid Eve's ancient debt, for the new Adam came forth from you.

[To Christ]: As God, you rose from the tomb in glory,

Raising the world with yourself.

Human nature praises you as God, for death has vanished.

Adam exults, Master.

Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage and cries to you:

You are the Giver of resurrection to all, O Christ.

[To Mary]: You are most blessed, O Virgin

Mother of God [the Son]

For through the One who was born of you,

*Hades* has been captured and Adam recalled.

The curse has been annulled and Eve set free.

Death has been slain so we are granted life.

Blessed is Christ our God, whose good will it was.

Glory to you. □

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#### "Descent of Jesus into Hell"

A panel from "Passion of Rothenburg" (1494). Reichsstadt Museum Tauber, Bavaria.

Under the banner of the Cross, Christ has shattered the gates of Hades, put his foot on the head of the Death and with his wounded hand, rescues those who had been enslaved there, beginning with Adam and Eve (note the fruit in Eve's hand).